ADAM AND THE ANGELS: AN EXAMINATION OF MYTHIC ELEMENTS IN ISLAMIC SOURCES[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines the involvement of the angels in the creation of Adam as an example of mythopoetic activity in Islam. This involvement takes the form of the angels' reaction to Adam's creation and to Adam's superior knowledge. These themes also developed within an anti-Gnostic polemic; the figure of the First Man is important for Gnosticism no less than for Judaism or Islam, yet their visions of this figure differed greatly. The relations between Adam and the angels is an important refraction of the differences between these religions. Comparison of tales from three Islamic genres—*tafsīr, ta'rīḫ* and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*—with rabbinical legends shows that, contrary to expectations, Islamic material provides a more mythic conception of these themes than does Jewish *midrash*.

1. *Introduction*

This paper aims to examine various reports of the involvement of the angels in the creation of Man as an example of mythopoetic activity in Islam. The study of myth has enjoyed renewed scholarly attention in recent years, and entire books have been devoted to the discussion of the question "What is myth?"[2] There is general agreement

[1] This article is based on part of my MA thesis, "Mythic and Gnostic aspects of the story of the Creation of Man, comparing Midrash and Islamic Literature" (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999), supervised by Prof. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh and Dr. Meir M. Bar-Asher. I would like to thank Dr. Bar-Asher for his willingness to begin supervising a thesis that was near completion, and for his unfailing helpfulness and good advice ever since. I would like to thank David Cook and Linda Barron, who read earlier drafts of this paper.

A note on translations: quotations from the Bible use *The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, 1955). Quotations from the Qur'ān use R. Bell, *The Qur'an: Translated with a critical rearrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh, 1937-39). All other Arabic material is my own translation, as is Hebrew material that does not specifically cite a translator.

[2] Some surveys of the subject are W. G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Tuscaloosa, 1986); L. Patton and W. Doniger (eds.), *Myth and Method* (Charlottesville, 1996), L. Coupe, *Myth* (London, 1997).

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that a myth in the comparative-religious (or comparative-literary) sense is not a lie or a fiction, the usual meaning of myth in everyday speech. Beyond that, confusion and controversy reign. The definition of myth I found most suited to my purpose is that used in folklore. The accepted definition of a myth in folklore is: a sacred narrative which explains how the world and humanity reached their present state.[3] This definition encompasses what, to my mind, are the two most important components of any myth: narrative and explanation. People have always tried to understand the world in which they live, and myth is an expression of this search for knowledge which is not necessarily historical, but can provide us with answers to our basic existential questions.[4] These answers take the form of stories that are regarded by the culture telling them as the basis for its manners and morals. They usually involve higher beings, and often a certain version of the myth will be preserved in the culture's scriptures or recited during festivals. A myth is not necessarily an explanation in the sense of making clearer something not understood; rather, it is an interpretation, a particular way of perceiving the world.

Islam has traditionally seen itself as a religion based on divinely-revealed law (the *šarīʿa*), rather than on myth. Striving to achieve a pure and perfect monotheism, the guardians of the *šarīʿa* regarded myth as a remnant of the pagan past, and storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) who expanded and passed on old tales were often regarded with suspicion.[5] However, the commentators on the Qurʾān and Ḥadīṯ (traditions attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad) were unable to refrain from expanding the mythic elements contained in revelation, while poets and mystics eagerly leapt into the ocean of ancient mythological traditions and interpreted them in their own ways. In this paper I will not be studying the mystical tradition. My purpose is to look for sparks of myth within the tradition that apparently was hostile to it, in stories about Adam, the first

[3] In contrast to legends, which are narratives told as true stories set in the period after the creation of the world, and to folk tales, which the audience realizes are fictional. See on this A. Dundes, "Madness in Method, plus a Plea for Projective Inversion," in: L. Patton and W. Doniger (eds.), *Myth and Method* (Charlottesville, 1996), p. 147. Folklore motif-numbers are taken from S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis, 1966).

[4] A. Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God* (Charlottesville, 1994), p. 125.

[5] Ch. Pellat, "Ḳaṣṣ," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition (Leiden, 1960-to date), vol. 4, pp. 733-735.

man, and his interactions with the angels, specifically their reaction to his creation and to his superior knowledge.

A central methodological tool in this hunt will be comparison of early Islamic texts with Jewish sources. Until recently Judaism was considered the anti-mythic religion *par excellence*. This view was most forcefully expressed by the renowned Bible scholar Y. Kaufmann, according to whom Israelite religion does not merely oppose myth, but is unable to understand its essence.[6] While the question of myth in Judaism has been controversial for many years, more and more scholars are now of the opinion that myth does indeed exist within Judaism—possibly due to a change in the perception of myth, which is no longer seen as a tale from the biographies of the gods, but rather as a narrative that stabilizes and organizes the various components of a certain culture within a framework of meaning and values.[7]

Much of the discussion of myth in Judaism has revolved around the character of God. It is appropriate to widen this discussion to include the figure of Adam, the First Man, for he is seen as an almost superhuman being, meant to serve as an example and paradigm for us, his children, in our lives.[8] This understanding of myth as paradigm for history is also valid in an Islamic context.[9] In the same way as students of myth in Judaism have turned from remnants of myth in the Bible to the fuller development of these motifs in *midrash*, I have examined material taken from three genres which have all, in one way or another, developed out of the Qurʾān—*tafsīr* (Qurʾānic exegesis), *taʾrīḫ* (history) and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (stories of the pre-Islamic prophets)[10]—and compared what I found there to parallel stories from the Jewish tradition. I have cited mostly early authors, later ones usually merely repeating their predecessors. The exegetes examined here are Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767),[11]

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[6] Y. Kaufmann, *Israelite Religion* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1954), *passim*.

[7] I. Gruenwald, "The Unpreventable Presence of Myth—Opening Essay," in: H. Pedaya (ed.) *Eshel Beer-Sheva 4: Myth in Judaism* (Beersheba, 1996), p. 3. [in Hebrew].

[8] A magisterial overview of the subject is C. Schöck, *Adam im Islam: Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna* (Berlin, 1993).

[9] The period of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first generation of Muslims often takes the place of the primordial period of Creation in other cultures. For an overview of Islam's attitude to myth and history see M. Forward, "Islam," in: J. Holm and J. Bowker (eds.), *Myth and History* (London, 1994), pp. 97-118.

[10] On the connections between the Qurʾān and these genres, see M.J. Kister, "Ādam: A study of some legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīṯ* literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), p. 114.

[11] For his biography, see M. Plessner – A. Rippin, "Muḳātil b. Sulaymān," *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 508-509.

Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)[12] and Ibn Kaṯīr (d. 774/1373);[13] the historians are Ṭabarī, Masʿūdī (d. 345/956)[14] and Maqdisī (fl. 355/966);[15] and the two most famous expositors of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* are Kisāʾī[16] and Ṯaʿlabī (d. 1035/427).[17]

Legends about the creation of Adam are scattered throughout the rabbinic literature. I have referred to sources appearing in *Torah Shelemah*[18] and in the notes to Ginzburg's *The Legends of the Jews*,[19] in addition to a systematic reading of *Genesis Rabbah*[20] and *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*.[21]

Another method of searching for the sparks of myth takes us to the pre-Islamic period, and to the Gnostic religion. This religion, possibly the *minim* (sectarians) of the Sages, was active in the Middle East in

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[12] For a detailed biography, see F. Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari* (Albany, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 5-134. For his general treatment of Adam, see Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, pp. 17-22. On Ṭabarī's historiography and mythography in all his works, see C. Gilliot, "Récit, mythe et histoire chez Tabari. Une vision mythique de l'histoire universelle," *MIDEO* 21 (1993), pp. 277-289; *idem*, "Mythe, récit, histoire du salut dans le commentaire coranique de Tabari," *Journal asiatique* 282 (1994), pp. 237-270.

[13] For his biography, see H. Laoust, "Ibn Kaṯīr," *EI2*, vol. 3, pp. 817-818.

[14] For his biography, see Ch. Pellat, "Masʿūdī," *EI2*, vol. 6, pp. 784-789.

[15] For his biography, see Ed., "al-Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maḳdisī," *EI2*, vol. 7, p. 762; C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Bible* (Leiden, 1996), p. 50. For his general treatment of Adam, see Schöck, *ibid.*, pp. 23-29.

[16] For possible identifications of this author, see T. Nagel, "Kisāʾī," *EI2*, vol. 5, p. 176; A. Schussmann, "Stories of the Prophets in Muslim Tradition: Mainly on the basis of Ḳisas al-Anbiyāʾ by Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah al-Kisāʾī," (unpublished Ph.D. diss.; Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 6-8 [in Hebrew]. For an evaluation of his *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, see Schöck, *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

[17] For his biography, see A. Rippin, "Ṯaʿlabī," *EI2*, vol. 10, p. 434. For an evaluation of his *ʿArāʾis al-maǧālis*, see Schöck, *ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

[18] M. Kasher (ed.), *Ḥumash Torah Shlemah* (Jerusalem, 1926), vol. 1.

[19] L. Ginzburg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1909), vols. 1 (text), 5 (notes).

[20] *Genesis Rabbah* is an exegetical *midrash* on the Book of Genesis. It comprises partly simple explanations of words and phrases, and partly aggadic interpretations, sometimes only slightly related to the biblical text. Based on the names of the Sages and the events therein, *Genesis Rabbah* is usually dated to later than 400 CE, but includes earlier material. (G. Stemburger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* [Edinburgh, 1996], pp. 277-279) Citations of *Genesis Rabbah* are from J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic commentary to the Book of Genesis, a new American translation* (Atlanta, 1985), vol. 1.

[21] *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* represents the "rewritten Bible" genre, retelling the events of the Bible in a continuous and coherent fashion. However, it continues to preserve certain elements of *midrash* (e.g., giving the names of traditionists; not attempting to harmonize different traditions). *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* is dated to the eighth or ninth century CE, and contains many references to Muslim rule. However, many very old traditions, too, are preserved here; possibly complete chapters have been taken over from earlier sources almost without change. (Stemburger, pp. 329-330) Citations of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* are from G. Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer. The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great* (New York, 1981).

the second to fourth centuries CE. It is a matter of some controversy as to whether the Gnostics were heretic Christians, Jews or pagans. Their creation myth is similar to speculations current already in the first century BCE, based on Greek philosophy and echoes of which we can find in the writings of Philo Judaeus. This myth derived, ultimately, from the Platonic creation myth appearing in the *Timaeus*, combined with Genesis. Myth is essential to the Gnostic systems,[22] and certain mythic elements in rabbinic thought can best be understood as polemic against the Gnostics. Some of these ideas reappear in the Muslim materials to be examined here.

Gnosticism was a religion composed of many sects and religious systems.[23] The principal source that I have drawn upon in this paper is the long version of *The Apocryphon of John*, which appears in codices II and IV of the Coptic Gnostic Library uncovered at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. In this work, the Demiurge, the creator god of this material world and the son of Sophia (Wisdom—the lowest spiritual divine being), announces that he is the only god. As a result, a heavenly voice proclaims that "There is Man and the son of Man," and the Demiurge and the archons, beings who take part in ruling this world, are vouchsafed a glimpse of the Anthropos, the spiritual First Man who is also the Supreme God. The Demiurge and archons decide to create Adam in the image of the Anthropos, and create "the animate Adam," a non-material being which has a soul (*psyche*) but no spirit (*pneuma*). At this stage, Adam is incapable of movement and lies on the ground, until Sophia persuades the Demiurge to breathe his spirit into him. Thus, the divine spark that Sophia stole in order to give birth to the Demiurge passes from him to Adam. The archons immediately understand that they have created a being superior to themselves and imprison him in a material body. In other words, Adam is composed of body, soul and spirit, with the body and soul both the creations of the forces ruling this world and through which he is enslaved to Fate. Within the soul

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[22] Stroumsa considers Gnosticism's importance for the history of religions as its being the last flowering of mythic thought in the ancient world and an attempt to reverse the process of de-mythologization begun by the prophets of Israel and the Greek philosophers. See G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden, 1984), p. 1.

[23] The question whether Gnosticism was in fact a separate religion, or was merely a tendency that appeared in a number of religions and belief systems in late antiquity, is the subject of debate. See, on one side: B. Pearson, "Introduction," in *idem*, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1990), pp. 6-9 and references there; B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York, 1987), pp. xxi-xxii; on the other: M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism:" an argument for dismantling a dubious category* (Princeton, 1996).

is the spirit, also called the "spark," part of the divine power which has fallen into our world—and the body was created to ensure that it remains here. In a state of non-salvation, the spirit within the body and soul is not aware of itself and is depicted as paralysed, asleep or poisoned; it "doesn't know." Awakening and salvation are achieved through *gnosis*.[24]

2. *The angels' response to the creation of Adam*

The involvement of the angels in the process of Adam's creation raises first and foremost the problem of the involvement of other beings beside God in his creation. According to Gnostic myth, man was created by the archons, inferior and evil spiritual beings.[25] Here I will discuss a number of traditions from the *midrash* and Muslim literature which indicate a mythic attitude, developed to a greater or lesser extent, while at the same time reflecting anti-Gnostic polemics. As the function of Iblīs/Satan has been discussed extensively by Awn,[26] I will limit my comments on this matter to comparing Iblīs' behavior to that of the other angels.

The announcement of God's intention to create man is phrased in Genesis 1:26 in the plural: "Let us make man" (Hebrew: *naʿaseh adam*). Implicitly, God is speaking to someone—to whom? One possible answer given by the *midrash* is to the angels.[27] The Qurʾān, on the other hand, is explicit: God announced to the angels (rather than consulting with them,[28] as *Genesis Rabbah* 8 suggests) that He was about to create a human being in vv. 2:30 and 15:28.

A subject that received a great deal of attention from Muslim exegetes was the question: Who were the angels that, after God informed them of Adam's impending creation, opposed this and later were ordered to bow down to Adam? Muqātil's presentation is consistent: In his com-

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[24] On knowledge as a religious ideal in Gnosticism, see I. Gruenwald, "Knowledge and Vision," *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973), pp. 77ff.

[25] *The Apocryphon of John* (Codex II), pp. 15-20 (= Layton, pp. 39-44).

[26] For an in-depth discussion of Satan in Islam, see Peter Awn's fascinating study, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden, 1983).

[27] Additional suggestions appearing in *Genesis Rabbah* are the works of heaven and earth, the things created on each prior day, God's own heart (all in *Gen. Rabbah* 8.3 [= Neusner trans., pp. 76-77]), and the souls of the righteous (*Gen. Rabbah* 8.7 [= Neusner trans., p. 80]).

[28] Kister, p. 116, n. 16, cites cases of Muslim scholars who also held the view that God consulted the angels, and did not merely inform them; these were, however, a minority.

mentary on Q, 2:30 ("(Recall) when thy Lord said to the angels: 'Lo, I am going to place a vice-regent in the earth.' They said: 'Wilt Thou place in it one who will work corruption and shed blood? We sing hymns in Thy praise and ascribe holiness to Thee.' He replied: 'I know what ye know not.'"), he relates that God created the angels, who are the inhabitants of the heavens, before he created the *ǧinn* and mankind, who are the inhabitants of the earth. The *ǧinn* quarreled among themselves and fought with each other on earth, until God sent a heavenly army against them. Iblīs stood at the head of this angelic host. These angels lived an easier life on earth than they had done previously in heaven. God addressed only these angels, and not all the angels, perhaps because only they had a direct interest in what happened on earth.[29] In other words, the *ḫalīfa* referred to in the verse is understood by Muqātil as meaning that Adam (= mankind) is the deputy of the angels: he replaces and succeeds them on earth, where he will act as they did before him.[30] Muqātil repeats this in his commentary on Q, 7:11 and 15:28-30, which deal with the angels' prostration before Adam, and on Q, 76:1, which refers to the process of Adam's creation.

Ṭabarī also quotes a tradition according to which the angels active in this matter are those who lived on earth with Iblīs, who belong to the tribe of al-Ḥinn.[31] They are the only angels to participate in the events surrounding Adam's creation. God's addressing them is meant to test them and to show how helpless and ignorant they are in comparison with God.[32] It is possible to suggest that this tradition was meant to separate Iblīs' punishment from his refusal to bow down to Adam and to turn it into a punishment for a general attitude of pride. However, this seems unlikely to me: The tradition appears to emphasize that Iblīs' arrogance is expressed precisely at this juncture—and that God was aware of Iblīs' pride but chose not to punish him for his thoughts, but

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[29] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsir* (Cairo, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 96-97.

[30] W. al-Qadi, "The term 'khalifa' in early exegetical literature," *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1988), p. 400. The understanding of *ḫalīfa* in this verse as meaning that Adam is God's deputy, although probably the most "obvious" interpretation, actually appears in the Muslim exegetical literature only from Ṭabarī onwards. (*ibid.*, pp. 406-408); cf. Kister, pp. 117, 127-129.

[31] This may be a hint that these angels are more closely related to the *ǧinn* than others—in the Arabic alphabet, the difference between *al-ǧinn* and *al-ḥinn* is a single dot.

[32] Muḥammad b. Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ǧāmiᶜ al-bayān ᶜan taᵓwīl ayy al-Qurᵓān* (Cairo, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 201-203 (= Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*). Cf. Ṭabarī, *Annales at-Tabarī*, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1879; repr., 1964), series 1, pp. 92-93; F. Rosenthal (trans.), *The History of al-Tabari* (Albany, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 264-265 (= *Annales*, translation).

only when he attempted to realize his pride. God knew in advance of Iblīs' intention to oppose His command, and wished to show this to the angels.[33]

The later commentator, Ibn Kaṯīr, quotes Ṭabarī extensively in his own commentary on Q, 2:30, but also brings new ideas, many taken from the traditions of *ahl al-kitāb* ("The People of the Book," i.e. Jews and Christians), as to the identity of these angels. One version refers to ten thousand angels who asked "Wilt Thou place in it one who will work corruption and shed blood?" and were burned by fire which came from God.[34] Another, transmitted from the Šīʿī *imām* Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. circa 115/735),[35] reports that Hārūt and Mārūt were the angels who questioned God's creation of man. Hārūt and Mārūt probably appear here due to their role in the exegetical tradition. These angels, mentioned in Q, 2:102, volunteered to go down to earth in order to verify whether they would be tempted to act like humans, if placed under the same conditions. Upon their departure they were ordered to avoid idolatry, fornication, murder and the drinking of wine. However, they succumbed almost immediately to the charms of a beautiful woman. They killed a man who saw them with this woman. The angels who had remained in heaven were forced to admit that God was right, and that they were no better than the humans. Hārūt and Mārūt preferred punishment in this world rather than punishment in the next, and consequently were hanged by their heels down a well in Babylon. According to the version appearing in *Midrash Abkir*,[36] whose sources are Islamic (alternatively, this tale may itself have been absorbed by Islam), when the angels sinned they lost the use of the Name of God which would have enabled them to return to heaven. The woman (whose name—Anahīd, Bidaḫt, Zahrā' or Naʿama—connects her to the planet Venus) managed to learn the Ineffable Name from them, though, and herself reached heaven, where God transformed her into a star.[37]

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[33] Ṭabarī, *Annales*, series 1, p. 87 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 258).

[34] Ibn Kaṯīr, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut, 1966), vol. 1, p. 124. This is a shortened version of a tradition appearing in the Babylonian Talmud, which will be discussed below.

[35] Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn was the fifth *imām* (spiritual leader) of the Twelver Šīʿites. Considered the first consolidater of the principles of Šīʿism, he continued his father's tradition of quietism and devoted himself to study. (E. Kohlberg, "Muḥammad b. ʿAlī . . . al-Bāqir," *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 397-400).

[36] A homiletic *midrash* on Genesis and Exodus, known today only from some fifty quotations in other works. The language and content indicate composition in a late period; the book itself was still known in the sixteenth century. (Stemburger, p. 313).

[37] G. Vajda, "Hārūt wa-Mārūt," *EI2*, vol. 3, pp. 236-237.

This legend originates in the description of the sons of God and daughters of men in Gen. 7:1-4, which was greatly expanded in Jewish apocryphal literature, connecting the sin of Adam and Eve with the sins of the sons of God, who were understood as angels.[38] From there the story reached Gnostic circles, where it underwent further development: The forces of evil are constantly seeking to unite with pure elements. The connection between Satan and the angels who came to earth was placed within the basic pattern of the malicious deeds of the lascivious Demiurge and his henchmen the archons. History becomes a series of confrontations between pure women and the archons (the angels),[39] one of the women being Nora or Naʿama, the sister of Seth.

In Muḥammad al-Bāqir's version of this story, Hārūt and Mārūt were the assistants of an angel called al-Siğill, who had the privilege of looking three times a day in the *umm al-kitāb*, the heavenly original of the Qurʾān. One day, al-Siğill took a glance at the *umm al-kitab* when he was not supposed to, read there of the creation of man and his deeds in the future, and reported what he found there to Hārūt and Mārūt. When God said "Lo! I am going to place a vice-regent in the earth," they were the ones who said "Wilt Thou place in it one who will work corruption and shed blood?"[40]

As for the versions of authors who are not Qurʾān interpreters, Masʿūdī repeats the words of his predecessors, mainly Ṭabarī.[41] In contrast, Maqdisī reports that God decided to create Adam as a test for the angels, and therefore He informed all the angels, both in heaven and in earth, that he was about to place a deputy (*ḫalīfa*) on earth.[42] Kisāʾī, too, does not differentiate between the angels in the heavens and the angels upon earth—all must bow down before Adam.[43]

The angels in general oppose Adam's creation,[44] but for a variety of different reasons. A major reason for this are the sins that Adam and/or his descendants will commit in the future. This idea appears explicitly in the Qurʾān, in the angels' words to God "Wilt Thou place in it one

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[38] For a detailed discussion of the different versions of this story, see Stroumsa, pp. 18-31.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

[40] Ibn Kaṯīr, vol. 1, pp. 123-124.

[41] Masʿūdī, *Murūğ al-ḏahab wa-maʿādin al-ğawhar*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut, 1966), §§ 37-38, 40, 42.

[42] Maqdisī, *Kītāb al-badʾ wa-ʾl-taʾrīḫ*, ed. Cl. Huart (Paris, 1899), vol. 2, p. 84.

[43] Kisāʾī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (Leiden, 1923), p. 27.

[44] A1217.1—Angels oppose creation of Man.

who will work corruption and shed blood?" (Q, 2:30) Ṭabarī reports the following tradition (summarized) relating to this issue, transmitted on the authority of Ibn Zayd (d. 182/798):[45] When God created Hellfire, the angels, who were the only creatures then in existence, asked Him for what purpose it was being created. God replied that He created Hellfire for those of His creatures that were to rebel against him. The angels inquired whether a day would come in which they would rebel. When God explained that He intended to create additional beings, whom He would place on earth and that they would corrupt it and shed blood, the angels were shocked and suggested that He send them to earth rather than the other beings, as they, the angels, would always obey Him. God answered them by saying: "I know what ye know not." (Q, 2:30)[46]

Another reason for the angels' objection to the creation of Adam is their own pride and their jealousy of him.[47] This idea appears in the post-Islamic Jewish work, *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer.*

> "Envy, cupidity and ambition remove man (Adam) from the world." The ministering angels spake before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: Sovereign of all Worlds! "What is man, that thou shouldst take note of him?" (Ps. 144:3) "Man (Adam) is like unto vanity," (*ibid.*, 4) upon earth there is not his like. (God) answered them: Just as all of you praise Me in the heights of heaven, so he professes My Unity on earth, nay, moreover, are you able to stand up and call the names for all the creatures which I have created? They stood up, but were unable (to give the names). Forthwith Adam stood up and called the names for all the creatures, as it is said "And the man gave names to all cattle." (Gen. 2:20) When the ministering angels saw this they retreated and the ministering angels said: If we do not take counsel against this man so that he sin before his Creator, we cannot prevail against him.[48]

This is the first time that we explicitly hear of jealousy on the part of the angels toward Adam, due to his superior knowledge. In *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* the narrative-mythic dimension is more developed than in *Genesis Rabbah.* In contrast to the earlier work's atomistic structure, the author of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* is free to tell the story of Adam's creation in one narrative. He does not interpret the Torah directly, but rather tells a tale that expands on the biblical story (and the early *midrash*). According to Rubenstein,

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[45] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam: Considered a weak (*ḍaʿīf*) transmitter, and even accused of transmitting invented Traditions (*mawḍūʿāt*). (Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Taḥḏīb al-taḥḏīb* [Beirut, 1404/1984], vol. 6, pp. 161-162).

[46] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 207.

[47] A1217.1.1—Angels complain after the creation of Man; jealous of Man being preferred to them.

[48] *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, p. 91.

> The Tanhuma[49] and Pirqe de-Rabbi Eli'ezer revise rabbinic sources to create their myths; they contain few ideas not documented in classical rabbinic texts. The innovation of these midrashim is in the use of narratives, a development that several scholars have documented. The medieval midrashim fashion sustained myths by weaving mythic motifs into larger structures (a larger complex of traditions) and extended narratives (adding details or descriptions). Exegesis in rabbinic sources often becomes story in the medieval midrashim. When the sources contain mythic motifs, the story will be an extended myth.[50]

Moreover, the very fact that in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* we hear only one voice (in contrast to the many voices heard in *Genesis Rabbah*), adds to its mythic dimension: Although myth, as a story claiming to provide authoritative answers to existential questions, can speak in many voices, often a particular version is considered "truest." This version may push the other versions aside, and from a possible reading of the myth become *the* reading of the myth. The single voice in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* may be an attempt to reach such a status, of the "correct" version of the Adam myth.

In a tradition transmitted on the authority of Qatāda (d. circa 117/735),[51] the angels know that Allah hates bloodshed and therefore they object to the creation of mankind, which will shed blood. Allah rejects their arguments, for He knows that among Adam's descendants there will be prophets and saints. The tradition ends with the ironic words: "And we were told that Ibn ʿAbbās [d. 68/686][52] used to say: When Allah began to create Adam, the angels said: 'It cannot be that Allah will create a being dearer to him than us or knowing more than we do.'"[53] In another version, transmitted on the authority of Qatāda

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[49] *Tanḥuma*, or *Yelamdenu*, is a homiletic *midrash* on the entire Pentateuch, which has come down to us in a number of recensions. Today there are two versions, which represent different textual traditions: the printed Tanhuma and the Buber edition. The dating of the work is controversial, with opinions ranging from 400 CE to the middle of the ninth century. (Stemberger, pp. 295-305)

[50] J.L. Rubenstein, "From mythic motifs to sustained myth: The revision of rabbinical traditions in medieval midrashim," *Harvard Theological Review* 89.2 (1996), pp. 133-134.

[51] Abū 'l-Ḫaṭṭāb Qatāda b. Diʿāma b. Qatāda al-Sadusī: a *ṭābiʿī* (member of the second generation of Muslims) renowned for his phenomenal memory and wide knowledge of genealogy, lexicography, history, Qurʾānic exegesis and *ḥadīṯ*. (Ch. Pellat, "Ḳatāda b. Diʿāma," *EI2*, vol. 4, p. 748).

[52] ʿAbdallāh b. al-ʿAbbās: one of the youngest, and longest-lived, of the Companions of the Prophet. Muslim tradition considers him one of the greatest scholars of the first generation of Muslims, and "the father of Qurʾānic exegesis." (L. Veccia Vaglieri, "ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās," *EI2*, vol. 1, pp. 40-41).

[53] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 205; cf. *Annales*, series 1, pp. 98-99 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 270).

and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728),[54] the angels, who know only what Allah has informed them, think that they know everything (and certainly more than Adam could know, for they are his seniors), and oppose Adam's creation due to this opinion (*fa-ʿaraḍū bi-ray'ihim*).[55]

Clearly, the objection due to pride and jealousy is closely connected to the issue of Adam's knowledge. It seems that the angels' pride in their knowledge caused Adam's superiority to be expressed through his own knowledge. However, one must beware of assuming that Adam was superior to the angels in all aspects. According to the Sages, mankind's superiority to the angels is contingent upon the observance of the Torah received due to our good qualities.[56] This idea is true of Islam as well.

This knowledge, which brings Adam close to divinity, is reminiscent of the Gnostic myth according to which the Mother, Sophia (Wisdom), advised the Demiurge to breathe his spirit into Adam so that Adam might be able to move. Thus Sophia's power, which had been within the Demiurge, passed into Adam, and the archons, who had taken part in Adam's creation, realized that they had made a being superior to themselves. Since up to now this had been a purely spiritual creation, they imprison Adam in a material body.[57]

In Jewish sources, responses to Adam's creation include arguments between different groups of angels as to whether Adam should be created,[58] and attempting to harm him.[59] These responses did not appear in the Muslim sources examined here.

The quarrel between different groups of angels appears in *Genesis Rabbah*:[60]

> Said R. Simon,[61] "When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create the first man, the ministering angels formed parties and sects. Some of them said: 'Let him

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[54] Abū 'l-Saʿīd al-Ḥasan b. Abī 'l-Ḥasan Yassār al-Baṣrī: a famous preacher of the Umayyad period, noted for his asceticism. Later claimed as one of their own by many different schools within Islam. (H. Ritter, "Ḥasan al-Baṣrī," *EI2*, vol. 3, pp. 247-248).

[55] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 205; cf. *Annales*, series 1, pp. 99-100 (= translation, vol. 1, pp. 270-272).

[56] E.E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 156.

[57] G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Oxford, 1990), p. 93; *The Apocryphon of John* (Codex II), p. 19, l. 35-p. 20, l. 8 (= Layton, pp. 43-44).

[58] A1217.1.3—Angels divided among themselves about creation of Man.

[59] A1217.1.4—Angels try to burn and kill Man.

[60] *Gen. Rabbah* 8.5 (= Nuesner trans., pp. 78-79).

[61] R. Simon (Simeon ben Pazzi): a Palestinian *amora* of the second half of the third century CE. Considered to be mainly an aggadist, the foremost transmitter of R. Joshua ben Levi. (*Encyclopedia Judaica* [Jerusalem, 1971], vol. 14, pp. 1562-1563).

> be created' and some of them said: 'Let him not be created.' That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: 'Mercy and truth fought together, righteousness and peace warred with each other.' (Ps. 85:11) Mercy said, 'Let him be created, for he will perform acts of mercy.' Truth said, 'Let him not be created, for he is a complete fake.' Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, for he will perform acts of righteousness.' Peace said, 'Let him not be created, for he is one mass of contention.' What then did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground. The ministering angels then said before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Master of the Ages, how can you disgrace your seal [which is truth]? Let truth be raised up from the ground.' That is in line with the following verse of Scripture: 'Let truth spring up from the earth.' (Ps. 85:2)"

Altmann discussed this *midrash* against the background of apocryphal Adam literature and the Gnostic literature available to him, claiming that this is an expression of the mythic conception that the angels were hostile to Adam and were punished for this by God.[62] A prominent motif of the apocryphal Adam literature is the objection of Satan and his group to the creation of Man—a motif that reappears in the Qur'ān and in Muslim literature. According to Altmann, this hostility between Satan and Adam in the apocryphal literature is a reflection of the hostility between the principle of Evil and the primordial Man in Gnostic systems:[63] At the basis of Gnostic myth stands the figure of the Anthropos, the divine man, in whose image the Demiurge, the evil creator of this world, also created Adam.[64] In the *midrash*, instead of Satan and his group, all or some of the angels oppose Adam's creation. Similarly to the Gnostic motif of the planets objecting to the emanation of the forces of Light downward, in the *midrash* the angels oppose divine power going down to earth: They protest not only against Adam's creation, but also against the Torah and the Shekhinah passing from heaven to earth.[65]

The attempt to harm Adam appears in both versions of *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*,[66] and is noteworthy mainly for the method by which the angels attempt to harm Adam—burning him with fire; this being the same way in which God punishes the recalcitrant angels in the legends to be discussed below.

In the end, the angels are resigned to Adam's creation, but not before some of them are punished severely.[67] In his commentary on

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[62] A. Altmann, "The Gnostic background of the rabbinic Adam legends," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 33 (1944/45), p. 373.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 377.

[64] Filoramo, p. 87.

[65] Altmann, *ibid.*, pp. 375, 379.

[66] *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, ed. S. Schechter, (London, 1887; repr. New York, 1997), version A, ch. 1, p. 8; version B, ch. 8, p. 23.

[67] A123.5.4.1—Little finger of God burns angels.

Q, 15:29-28, Ṭabarī brings a report, transmitted on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās,[68] which is repeated by Ibn Kaṯīr with the comment that it is "unusual . . . and clearly a Jewish legend" (*ġarīb . . . wa-innahu isrāʾīlī*).[69] The following table summarizes the similarities and differences between this legend and a parallel one appearing in the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate Sanhedrin:

	Sanhedrin 38	*Ṭabarī/Ibn Kaṯīr*
Time of occurrence	When God was about to create Adam	When God created the angels
God's words	He said to them: Is it your will that We make a man in Our image?	I am creating man of clay, and when I finish creating him, bow down to him
The angels' response	(After hearing what Adam's deeds would be) What is man that You have been mindful of him (Ps. 8:4)	(Unrelated to Adam's deeds) We will not do so
The divine punishment	God extended his little finger among them and burned them	God sent fire against them and burned them
Second band	As above	As above
Third band	Acceptance of God's decree; at the time of the Flood and of the Tower of Babel, ask God whether the first bands had not been correct	As above
Fourth band	–	Acquiescence, except for Iblīs

Does the later Islamic version have a greater or lesser mythic dimension than the Jewish version, from which it is presumably derived? In the Talmud, God consults with the angels as to whether to create Adam at all, and there is a reason for their disapproval—the sins that Adam and/or his descendants will commit, especially as in the cases of the generation of the Flood and the generation of the tower of Babel. In the *tafsīr*s, God commands the angels to bow down to Adam, whom He intends to create in any case, and there is no obvious reason for

[68] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 14, p. 31.
[69] Ibn Kaṯīr, vol. 4, pp. 160-161.

their adamant objection to this, especially in light of one's impression that their continued existence is conditional on agreeing to bow to Adam. Even *tawḥīd*—the pure and uncompromising monotheism, which refuses to give any created being the honor due the Creator alone—the excuse that Iblīs gave in justification of his refusal to bow to Adam (at least according to the Ṣūfīs),[70] can not atone for disobedience to a direct order from God. In both cases, the last group of angels accepts the fact of Adam's creation (in the Talmud) and of their bowing down to him (in the *tafsīr*s), after the destruction of the previous groups. In the Talmud, the dialogue is more detailed and thus the angels' character is more solid (one feels that the angels do exist). In the Talmud the angels' punishment is through the finger of God—an ancient mythic motif[71]—and not merely through "fire" sent against them. In this case at least, it may be said that the mythic dimension of the Talmudic version is greater than that of the story proffered by Ṭabarī and Ibn Kaṯīr.

In contrast to the angry response appearing in these traditions, other versions emphasize God's mercy. He creates both righteous men and sinners, so that He will have opportunities to exercise His benevolence. According to *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, God replies to the Torah's objection to Adam's creation on the grounds that he will sin (here the anthropomorphized Torah takes the place of the angels elsewhere) by saying: "And is it for nought that I am called 'slow to anger' and 'abounding in love'?"[72] Similarly, in Muslim literature, God repeatedly tells the angels that he is creating Adam as a *ḫalīfa* because his descendants will include righteous men and prophets.[73]

The issue of the angels' prostration before Adam[74] appears both in *midrash* and in Muslim literature,[75] but while the "Jewish" angels are prevented from carrying out their intention, which originates in their mistaken belief that Adam is in fact God, the "Islamic" angels are responding to God's direct command. However, in both cases the

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[70] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, pp. 122f., esp. p. 124.

[71] See G.A. Klingbeil, "The Finger of God in the Old Testament," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 112 (2000), pp. 409-415.

[72] *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, p. 76.

[73] Muqātil, vol. 1, pp. 96-97; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 204-205; cf. *Annales*, series 1, pp. 98-99 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 270).

[74] V241—Angels honor mortal.

[75] For a review of Jewish and Christian traditions parallel to the Qur'ānic texts connected to the angels bowing down before Adam, see also S.M. Zwemer, "The worship of Adam by angels," *Muslim World* 27 (1937), pp. 115-127, where the emphasis is on tracing the origins of the Muslim version.

emphasis is on God's uniqueness and echoes of anti-Gnostic polemic are clear.

According to the Jewish legends, the angels wished to bow down to Adam,[76] or to say "Holy!" before him,[77] because they thought that he was God Himself. Altmann considers these traditions to be polemic against the Gnostic conception of Man as a god, and especially against the motif of bowing to him. The *midrashim* say that the angels (or all creatures) wished to bow to Adam, not because God had commanded them to do so, as He does in Islam, but against His will and by mistake. The mistake was corrected and it was made clear that Adam is not God, either by him falling asleep or by his own worship of God.[78]

The Muslim traditions leave no place for doubt that the angels knew that they were not bowing down to God. Indeed, the reason for Iblīs' rebellion is his refusal to obey this order, which contravenes a previous one, namely to worship God alone. They stress, therefore, that the bowing done was performed as an expression of adoration to God and as a greeting (*taḥiyya*) to Adam. God ordered the angels to bow down in order to try the recalcitrant Iblīs and his rebel band. Maqdisī sums up this topic:

> The meaning is that Allah knows that there are those among the angels who would cause rebellion and corruption and bloodshed, but the angels do not know this. Allah said to the angels: "See, I am going to create mankind from clay; so when I have formed him and breathed into him some of My spirit, fall down to him in obeisance." (Q, 28:71-72) The angels listened to His words and obeyed His voice and complied, all of them except Iblīs, the enemy of Allah. . . . When Allah had created Adam and breathed His spirit into him, He ordered the angels to bow down to him in order to test them, and especially so as to test Iblīs. This bowing down was a greeting (*taḥiyya*) and not an expression of worship (*ʿibāda*) to him. Others say that they were ordered to bow to Adam as the Muslim bows to the *qibla*,[79] and they all bowed down, as the Qur'ān tells us, except Iblīs.[80]

In addition to the "simple" prostration which appears throughout Muslim literature, the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* books give extravagant descrip-

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[76] *Gen. Rabbah* 8.10 (= Neusner trans., pp. 82-83).

[77] *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, p. 79.

[78] Altmann, *ibid.*, p. 387.

[79] The Muslim's prostration towards the *qibla* (i.e., in the direction of the sacred Kaʿba in Mecca) during prayer is not conceived as worship of the Kaʿba, but rather as worship of God via obedience to His command to pray in this manner. The 6th/12th century historian Ibn ʿAsākir relates that "God, may He be exalted, made Adam like the Kaʿba and commanded the angels to bow to him in worship, even as he commanded humans to bow down towards the Kaʿba." (*Ta'rīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, ed. ʿU. al-ʿUmarāwī [Beirut, 1415/1995], vol. 7, p. 398).

[80] Maqdisī, vol. 2, p. 83; cf. Ṭabarī, *Tafsir*, vol. 1, p. 207.

tions of the honors paid to Adam by the angels. Both Kisā'ī and Ṯa'labī[81] report that the angels carried Adam on their shoulders after he exhibited his knowledge. Kisā'ī adds a detailed description of Adam's sermon to the angels, including the angels' seating arrangements and Adam's regalia. It is here that Adam learns the names of all things and blesses the angels with the words *salām 'alaykum*, subsequently his descendants' greeting.[82]

There is no doubt that a process of mythicization has occurred in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*: The narrative is much more detailed, the role of the angels is more prominent and complex, and Adam is described in detail. The angels' objections have disappeared and their obedience to Allah (except for Iblīs) is total. Rubenstein's remarks on the development of myth in Jewish literature are valid for Muslim literature as well. The later sources develop existing ideas into complete narratives, myths. Instead of fragments of tales, brought from many transmitters, even if they repeat themselves, the myth is recounted as a single whole. Admittedly, one section may be on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās and another on that of Wahb b. Munabbih,[83] but the story remains one, complete in itself.

As we have seen, the different starting points of Judaism and Islam raise different concerns. While the authors of the *midrashim* must find a solution to the question of the presence of other entities beside God involved in Adam's creation, the Muslims ask: Which angels refused to bow to the *ḫalīfa* created by God, and what kind of prostration was this? It is inconceivable that the angels would actually worship one of God's creatures instead of Himself. These problems disposed of, both traditions discuss the angels' reactions to the idea of Adam being created. Within the sweeping consensus that the angels opposed this, it seems that in at least one aspect the Muslim tradition shows a more mythic conception than does the Jewish one, and this is in the matter of the motives of the angels objecting to Adam's creation, and/or those of Iblīs: There is agreement that the angels' protest derives from jealousy of Adam, and from fear lest he be wiser than they and thus preferred by Allah. The command to bow to him was a test that they

[81] Ṯa'labī, p. 20.

[82] Kisā'ī, pp. 28-29.

[83] Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732): South Arabian storyteller (*qaṣṣ*), possibly of Jewish origin. One of the major conduits of Jewish traditions into Islam. For a detailed biography see R.G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munnabih* (Wiesbaden, 1972), vol. 1.

passed successfully (except Iblīs). In the Jewish sources, the motif of the angels' jealousy appears explicitly only in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, which is known to have Islamic influences. The reason for the angels' objection in Judaism is usually mankind's tendency to sin (a reason that also appears in Islam), and the attribution of an emotion like jealousy to the angels intensifies their character: They are not abstract beings who only sing "Holy Holy Holy" all day, but rather are creatures with characteristics with which one can identify. This intensification is also an intensification of the mythic dimension of the Muslim story.

3. *Adam's knowledge*

One of the clearest expressions of Adam's superiority to other creatures is his knowledge, but there is a difference between Genesis' conception of this knowledge and that of the Qur'ān: While Genesis 2:19 says "And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name," the Qur'ān (2:31-33) says "He [Allah] taught Adam all the names, then He mustered them before the angels and said: 'Tell Me the names of these if ye speak the truth.' They said: 'Glory be to Thee! we have no knowledge but what Thou hast taught us; Thou art the Knowing, the Wise.' He said: 'O Adam, tell them their names.' Then when he had told them their names, He said: 'Did I not say to you, that I know the secret [things] of the heavens and the earth; I know what ye reveal.'" In other words, according to Genesis, Adam has the ability to create and invent things by himself, without God teaching him, whereas the Qur'ānic Adam receives the knowledge he needs in order to be God's *ḫalīfa*.[84]

3.1. *What is the difference between Adam's knowledge and that of the angels?*

There is general agreement in the sources under examination that the angels did not know the names of the animals. Jewish sources emphasize that Adam's knowledge, derived from his wisdom and understanding without God having taught him, is the reason for him being preferred to the angels: He knows the names of the animals and his

[84] I. Glaser, "Qur'anic challenges for Genesis," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 75 (1997), p. 11.

own name, while the angels do not.[85] A later version, from the Book of Eldad the Danite,[86] depicts a competition between Satan and Adam:[87] On the day that Adam was created, God commanded the angels to bow to him. Satan objected to this in the name of all the angels, as they had been created from the Glory of the Presence (*ziv ha-shekhinah*) while Adam was made of the dust of the earth. God replied that Adam had wisdom and understanding which he, Satan, lacked. Satan demanded that this be proved, and God suggested a contest in naming the animals he had created. If Satan were to know what names to give, Adam would bow to him and God would seat him in a place of honor. If Adam were to know what names to give, Satan would bow down to him and God would place him in the Garden of Eden. God and Satan went down to Eden, and Satan asked to be tested first. God presented him with a bull, a cow, a camel and a donkey, but Satan was unable to name them. In contrast, Adam had the wisdom to understand God's hints and gave the names of the animals based on the first letter of God's question: "God brought the bull and said: By what name shall this be called? As He began the question with a B, Adam answered: Bull." When Satan realized that God had given Adam understanding, he uttered a bitter shout of injured pride. As a result, God punished him further, by showing Adam all his descendants, and Adam named each and every one of them.[88]

Again, the role played in an early source by all the angels is performed by Satan alone in a later one. There are a number of points of resemblance between this narrative and Muslim legends on the subject: perhaps this is due to Muslim influence?[89] These points are (1) God's command to the angels to bow to Adam; (2) Satan's claim to superiority due to being created from the Glory of the Presence rather

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[85] *Gen. Rabbah* 17.4 (= Neusner trans., p. 183).

[86] Eldad the Danite was a ninth-century adventurer who claimed to come from an independent Jewish kingdom in east Africa. The tales of his adventures achieved such popularity that at least seventeen recensions have reached us. (Stemberger, pp. 329-330)

[87] H1598—Contest in naming animals between Adam and Satan; Adam wins.

[88] A. Epstein, *Eldad ha-Dani: seine Berichte über die X Stämme und deren Ritus* (Pressburg, 1891), pp. 66-67.

[89] The question of Jewish influences on formative Islam and vice versa is a vexed one, exacerbated by the lack of documentary (or other) evidence on both the Jewish and the Muslim side until about the tenth century CE. See S. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: the problem of symbiosis under early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), esp. p. 181: "... there was no unidirectional flow of influences into formative Islam. There was, rather, a synergy, a two-way street; certainly in the case of Judaism we know that it was altered, root and branch, in its growth in the soil of Islamicate civilisations."

than from the dust of the earth.[90] In the Latin *Book of Adam and Eve*, Satan claims to be better than Adam because he was created before him;[91] (3) It is stated explicitly that Adam knew the names of all his descendants (see below).

The Islamic sources emphasize that the angels' ignorance of the names is a continuation of their ignorance of the nature and character of the *ḫalīfa* God intended to place on earth. God makes this obvious when he parades the animals before them and they are forced to learn the names from Adam:

> Allah gathered all the birds and the beasts and the creeping things of the earth and taught Adam their names, saying: "O Adam, this is a horse, and this is a mule and this is a donkey," until He had named each beast and each bird by its name for him. Then He showed the owners of these names (*ahl tilka al-asmā'*) to the angels who were on the earth, and said: "Tell me the names of all the beasts of the earth, 'if ye speak the truth,' in that I intend to place on the earth one who would corrupt it and shed blood." The angels replied: "Glory be to Thee! we have no knowledge but what Thou hast taught us; Thou art the Knowing, the Wise." (Q, 2:33) . . . Allah said to them: "How can you claim to knowledge about what has not yet been created and you have not seen, when you do not know what you can see?" Allah commanded Adam to tell the angels the names of all the beasts of the earth and the birds, and he did so.[92]

This story appears in several versions in Ṭabarī,[93] and presents the angels again and again in a state of ignorance.[94] At the outset they are unaware of Iblīs' pride, due to which God had decided to place a *ḫalīfa* on earth; when God announces His plan to them, they oppose it because of a faulty analogy between the *ǧinn*'s sinful behavior, as shedders of blood and corrupters of the earth, in the past and the behavior of Adam's descendants in the future; finally, they are forced to admit their ignorance in these cases when confronted with a third case of lack of knowledge, this time that of the names of things.

Masʿūdī even reports that the angels bowed down to Adam as a result of his superior knowledge. When Allah created Adam, He informed

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[90] Cf. Iblīs' exclamation "I am better than he; You created me of fire and created him of clay!" (Q, 7:12, 38:86).

[91] J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1983), vol. 2, p. 262 [= *Vita Adae et Evae* 14:3].

[92] Muqātil, vol. l, p. 98.

[93] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 201, 204, 206-208, 215-216; cf. *Annales*, series 1, pp. 95-97, 100-101 (= translation, vol. 1, pp. 267-269, 272).

[94] For a detailed study of these traditions, analyzing in particular the meaning of the angels' lack of knowledge in the context of Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, see now C. Gilliot, "De l'impossible censure du récit légendaire *Adab* et *tafsīr*: deux voies pour édifier l'ethos de l'*homo islamicus*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 19 (1999), pp. 49-96.

the angels of Adam's superior knowledge "and thus Allah made Adam into a *miḥrāb*, a Kaʿba, a gateway and a *qibla* towards which the pure spirits and the angels bowed down."[95]

In the Gnostic myth, too, the phenomenon of the angels' ignorance exists. ("Angels" in this context refers to the Demiurge and the archons who rule this world.) The Demiurge's arrogant proclamation "I am God and there is no other"—a blatant lie according to the Gnostic system, where the Demiurge is the seventh generation of divine beings[96]—causes the revelation of the supreme god, the Anthropos, and the creation of Adam.[97] It is important to note here that the being responsible for the breathing of the divine spirit (*pneuma*) into Adam and the transfer of power from the Demiurge to Adam is none other than Wisdom (Sophia). The *pneuma* expresses Adam's superiority to the archons who created him, who do not realize what the Demiurge is doing (by mistake) by breathing Sophia's spirit into him until it is too late. That is to say, Adam has something that the archons do not have, something that Wisdom has given him—and that is knowledge. By virtue of the divine spark within him, Adam is capable of reaching the awareness (*gnosis*) that this world is ruled by the powers of darkness and that he must redeem himself from their chains. From the Gnostic point of view, this is the knowledge that makes Adam superior to the angels (= the archons).

3.2. *What is the content of Adam's knowledge?*

Most of the Jewish sources agree that Adam gave names to everything that was created, not only to the animals, including the smallest things.[98] This idea also appears in Muslim sources. Other versions emphasize that Adam named the angels, and God Himself,[99] and yet others point to the prophetic nature of the names: "Whatever he called a settlement is indeed a settlement and whatever he called wilderness is indeed wilderness."[100]

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[95] Masʿūdī, § 45.
[96] Layton, pp. 12-13, fig. 1.
[97] Filoramo, p. 89.
[98] E.g., *Midrash Haseroth ve-Yateroth*, p. 31.
[99] *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 2, para. 370, citing Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan in manuscript.
[100] *Midrash ha-Gadol*, p. 66. *Midrash ha-Gadol* is a thirteenth-century compilation from Yemen, the largest such work to have reached us. Although many of its sources are known, the unique mosaiclike style makes it difficult the reconstruct all of them. (Stemberger, p. 354).

Ṭabarī gives three options for the names that God taught Adam: the names of all things (and of the animals in particular), the names of the angels and the names of his descendants. The other exegetes also bring these categories. The majority of traditions say that God taught Adam the names of all things, down to the smallest and most insignificant.[101] Ṭabarī also brings many traditions that detail the names God taught Adam, on the authority of Muǧahid (d. 100/718 or 104/722),[102] Saʿīd b. Ǧubayr,[103] Ibn ʿAbbas,[104] al-Rabīʿ b. Anas (d. 139 or 149/756-758)[105] and Qatāda.[106] A few traditions claim that God taught Adam only the names of the angels,[107] while a tradition transmitted on the authority of Ibn Zayd says that the knowledge that God inspired in Adam was the names of his descendants,[108] an idea that also appears in Eldad the Danite's account of the naming contest between Adam and Satan. Ibn Kaṯīr adds the suggestion of Ḥamīd al-Šāmī,[109] that God taught Adam the names of the stars.[110]

In addition to names, there are sources according to which Adam's knowledge was the knowledge of crafts or of languages:

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[101] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 201 (on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk > Ibn ʿAbbās); *ibid.*, pp. 204, 215 (Abū Ṣāliḥ > Ibn ʿAbbās); *ibid.*, pp. 206, 216 (Ḥasan and Qatāda); *ibid.*, p. 208 (Ibn Isḥāq).

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 215; cf. *Annales*, series 1, p. 95 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 267). Muǧāhid b. Ǧabr al-Makkī: a *tābiʿī* famous as a Qur'ān reader, who studied with Ibn ʿAbbās and other companions of the Prophet. Much of his information, which is extensively quoted by Ṭabarī, was taken from Jews and Christians. (A. Rippin, "Muǰāhid b. J̌abar al-Makkī," *EI2*, vol. 7, p. 293).

[103] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, *ibid.* Saʿīd b. Ǧubayr was a *tābiʿī* who transmitted *ḥadīṯ* from most of the important Companions of the Prophet. He was executed by the notorious Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ b. Yūsuf, but in what year is not certain. (*Taḥḏīb al-taḥḏīb*, vol. 4, pp. 11-13).

[104] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, *ibid.*

[105] *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207, 216; *cf. Annales*, series 1, pp. 100-101 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 272). al-Rabīʿ b. Anas: a pupil of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, considered a reliable transmitter of prophetic traditions. (*Taḥḏīb al-taḥḏīb*, vol. 3, p. 207).

[106] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 215-216; cf. *Annales*, series 1, p. 96 (= translation, vol. 1, pp. 267-268).

[107] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 216; *idem*, *Annales*, series 1, p. 96 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 268); Kisāʾī, p. 28.

[108] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, *ibid.*; cf. *Annales*, series 1, p. 97 (= translation, vol. 1, p. 269).

[109] Ḥamīd al-Šāmī: a relatively late transmitter, dated by Ibn Ḥaǧar to the generation after al-Šaybānī (d. 189/805), and who was known only to Abū Dā'ud and Ibn Māǧa. (*Taḥḏīb al-taḥḏīb*, vol. 3, p. 47).

[110] Ibn Kaṯīr, vol. 1, p. 127.

> R. Tanḥuma[111] in the name of R. Eleazar,[112] R. Menaḥama[113] in the name of Rab:[114] "All crafts did the first man teach them. What is the scriptural evidence for that statement? 'And they are craftsman from Adam.' (Is. 44:11) That is to say, from the first man."[115]
>
> Allah taught Adam all the names, until he knew all the languages, even the language of the snakes and the frogs, and everything that is on land or sea. Ibn ʿAbbās said: Adam spoke seven hundred languages, of which the noblest (*afḍaluhā*) is Arabic.[116]

In contrast to most sources, which are interested in the content of Adam's knowledge, Maqdisī is concerned with the essence of wisdom: How did Adam know the names?

> And [Allah] taught Adam all the names, teaching him through inspiration (*ilhām*). Some say through causing him to understand (*talqīn*). Ḥasan said: Teaching through the drawing of conclusions (*istidlāl*) and intellectual striving (*iǧtihād*), which Allah created when He created him able to elicit things by art and to draw conclusions (*mustanbitan mustadillan*). Adam drew conclusions from hints about the purposes of the name-bearing things (*al-musammiyāt*) and related them. The angels were made unaware of this, and Allah preferred Adam to them. (Adam) was worthy of the honor of the highest rank due to his use of intellectual striving.[117]

Adam's ability to use logic and to come to the right conclusion is what makes him special and raises him above all other creatures. As in the *Book of Eldad the Danite*, Adam learns the names from hints given to him by God. This may possibly be an expression of the views of Muʿtazilite circles, to which Maqdisī was close and which emphasized reason as a source of morality, in addition to revelation.

In the Gnostic myths there is no real description of the contents of Adam's knowledge, as the sublime wisdom that he was blessed with are the contents of these writings, some of which purport to be the sayings of sages like Seth and Jesus.

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[111] R. Tanḥuma bar Abba: a Palestinian *amora* of the first half of the fourth century CE. One of the most fertile aggadists; famed for his defense of Jews and Judaism in disputes with gentiles. (*EJ*, vol. 15, pp. 793-794).

[112] R. Eleazar (Lazar ben Pedat, d. 279): an *amora* who was born in Babylon and immigrated to Palestine. A prominent aggadist. (*EJ*, vol. 6, pp. 596-597).

[113] Unidentified.

[114] Rab: the leading Babylonian *amora* of the third century CE, founder of the academy at Sura. He studied for a time in Palestine, where he joined R. Judah the Prince's law-court. One of the most prominent Babylonian aggadists. (*EJ*, vol. 13, pp. 1575-1579).

[115] *Gen. Rabbah* 24.7 (= Neusner trans., p. 270).

[116] Kisāʾī, p. 28.

[117] Maqdisī, vol. 2, p. 93.

Franz Rosenthal, in his book *Knowledge Triumphant*, claims that *ʿilm* (knowledge) is one of the formative concepts of Islamic culture, to such an extent that there is no sphere in Muslim life that has not been influenced by the idea of knowledge as a supreme value.[118] The most important knowledge is that identified with religious insight, knowledge of a kind attributed in particular to biblical figures.[119] Muḥammad said that the only knowledge existing is that which God taught Adam.[120] This knowledge is a unique attribute of man and raises him above the angels.[121]

In Rosenthal's opinion, the concept of knowledge achieved in Islam a status unequalled in any other civilization.[122] Perhaps for this reason Adam's knowledge interests the Muslim sources far more than it does the Jewish ones. However, the wording of Genesis is less ambiguous than that of the Qurʾān: If we know that Adam named all the animals, his (and our) knowledge is more clearly defined than if we know that God taught him all the names. The second situations raises many more questions regarding the meaning and content of Adam's knowledge. In addition, the Qurʾān itself connects the angels' opposition to Adam's creation to the knowledge God gives him, and later Muslim sources develop the subject: Adam's knowledge proves not only his dominion in the world, but also the angels' mistake in doubting his suitability for this role. Knowledge, in this case as in so many others, is power in the simplest sense.[123]

There seems to be a more extensive discussion of the content of Adam's knowledge in Muslim literature, for example in the debate over specific examples of things whose names God taught Adam. The significance of this debate is unclear—did the exegetes simply bring the names of small and silly things, or pairs of opposites? As for Adam's knowledge of the names of stars and angels, these were presumably considered definitive examples of esoteric wisdom. We also have a statement in favor of Adam and against the angels: they did not know his essence, but he knew theirs. With regard to the knowledge of the names of his descendants, Vadet claims that this means that Adam knew who would be *ḫalīfa* after him, in the sense of the institution of the caliphate. Knowl-

[118] F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: the concept of knowledge in medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1970), p. 2.
[119] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[120] *Ibid.*, p. 194.
[121] According to al-Zarūǧī, a Ḥanafī lawyer of the sixth/twelfth century. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[122] *Ibid.*, p. 334.
[123] See on this issue also Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, pp. 87-88.

edge of the names of things, on account of which the angels bow down to Adam, is an expression of an agreement between God and humanity: If humanity will accept *taklīf*, the duty of performing God's commandments, God in return will grant *ḥukm*, dominion over the world.[124]

The idea that Adam knew all crafts and/or languages seems to be an expansion of the knowledge of names: Adam, as a culture hero, gave names not only to material things but also to deeds and abstract ideas. Languages are composed, of course, of many names. Yet, it is uncertain whether there is a truly mythic dimension in the different answers given in this debate. Mythicization takes place mainly in the comparison of Adam's knowledge with the knowledge (or lack thereof) of the angels. Knowledge is what makes Adam unique and from his knowledge he derives his place and role in the world. This idea exists in Gnosticism, too, but is very differently expressed: In Judaism and Islam, knowledge enables man to control the world and act within and upon it in accordance with God's commands; knowledge is "information about" things. In contrast, in Gnostic systems knowledge is the only means of achieving salvation in a higher, better world through a kind of acquaintance with God; knowledge is "knowledge of" God. As a result, the knowledge of Judaism and Islam is exoteric, open to whoever wishes to study, whereas the knowledge of the Gnostics is secret and available only to the chosen few.

4. *Conclusions*

In this paper, I have searched for mythic and Gnostic elements in the religious literature of two civilizations usually considered the sternest representatives of monotheism, and usually considered to reject myth. The fact that there is great confusion over the meaning of myth and the number of definitions is more or less the same as the number of researchers, enabled me to choose a definition that suited the characteristics of Judaism and Islam, and to examine the texts in light of this definition. Obviously, these texts do not represent important streams of thought like mysticism, philosophy or Šīʿism,[125] so my conclusions are necessarily limited.

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[124] J.-C. Vadet, "La création et l'investiture de l'homme dans le sunnisme ou la légende d'Adam chez al-Kisa'i," *Studia Islamica* 42 (1975), pp. 27-28. This article dates Kisāʾī to the eleventh century, and the description of Adam's creation and investiture is analyzed in the light of the Sunnite restoration under the Seljuks.

[125] For Šīʿī legends pertaining to Adam, see Kister, *passim*.

The sources show a picture of Adam and his role in the world that is ambivalent. On the one hand, Adam is the pinnacle of creation and God's deputy on earth—and on the other hand, already when he was created it was known that his descendants would be villains who would shed blood and corrupt the earth. This is particularly clear not only in the wording of Q, 2:30-31, but also in the *midrash*, where Adam is raised to a very high level, of *macroanthropos*,[126] while at the same time, it is made clear that he was not worthy of the angels' bowing to him, because of his future sin. Urbach notes that

> The views of the Sages concerning man . . . result from the contemplation of human existence, with all the contradictions that manifest themselves in man's character and actions, and in particular they flow from a consideration of the paradox in man, in whom there is, on the one hand, existence and being, and on the other, nothingness and void. Therefore they were very interested in probing into the creation and formation of man.[127]

Yet, Adam is not the definitive object of imitation in religious matters. After all, despite the Islamic doctrine of *ʿiṣma* (infallibility), Adam did eat the forbidden fruit and disobeyed a direct command of God. Other figures are more important religiously: in Judaism, Abraham, the father of the nation, and Moses, the first Jew; in Islam, again Abraham, the first *ḥanīf* (monotheist) and Muḥammad, the last prophet. In this context, it is worth noting that Adam appears in *ḥadīṯ* that primarily relate to eschatology, in which mankind is described as turning to him and begging for his protection from God's wrath, only to be told that he has no power of *šafāʿa* (intervention) and to be sent to other prophets, especially Muḥammad.[128]

In the specific themes examined here, the mythic dimension in Islam was usually more developed than in Judaism. There is evidence of different attitudes to myth in different genres and at different points in time. Both Judaism and Islam begin with a rejection of myth, to a greater or lesser degree. As we move forward in time, more and more mythic materials are absorbed, until reaction sets in. Indeed, the Torah is "freer" of myth than is the Qurʾān, which has already assimilated materials from the *midrash*. As noted above, later *midrashim* expand existing motifs into complete stories; the same is true, it seems, with regard

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[126] Urbach, p. 228.

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[128] J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden, 1936-1988), *s.v.* "Ādam."

to the Qur'ān and early exegetical works. The height of mythicization is found in genres of "rewritten scriptures," both in Judaism and in Islam. These works are usually popular in character, and make no claim to special legal or intellectual authority. On the contrary, it is precisely in learned circles that the reaction to myth sets in. Medieval Jewish commentary on the Torah usually reflects the author's philosophical or mystical interests, adding very little to the kind of myth found earlier. Parallel to this, Ibn Kaṯīr, the representative of medieval Islam in this paper,[129] expresses a negative attitude to myth and to narrative in general. However, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* and other forms of legends about biblical figures, which have become progressively more complex and narrative over the course of time, have continued to enjoy widespread popularity to this very day.[130]

The angels have a most central role in Adam's creation already in the Qur'ān. This simple fact opens up the way for the creation of more complex and detailed myths in Islam, with a bigger part for the angels, than in Judaism. The *midrash* had to put the angels into the picture drawn by Genesis; in Islam, they were there from the beginning. Much Muslim material has parallels in the *midrash*, but there are also mythic elements that can not be found there, and vice versa. Some of these elements reveal a Gnostic mode of thought, as in the question of the angels' knowledge. We still do not know enough about the Gnostic sects, about the religious atmosphere in pre-Islamic Arabia, and about the conditions during the first century and a half of Islam, to assert who exactly influenced whom, how Gnostic elements entered Islam, and whether Islam influenced the *midrashim* or the other way around.

[129] All other Muslim authors were early. For Ibn Kaṯīr as a break with the polyphonic *tafsīr* tradition, see N. Calder, "*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: problems in the description of a genre," in: G.R. Hawting and A.-K. Shareef (*eds.*), *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London, 1993), pp. 124, 126.

[130] E.g., Ginzburg's work in collecting Jewish legends and adapting them into a single narrative sequence, and 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Naǧǧār's collection of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* for the use of preachers in Egyptian mosques in the 1930s ('Abd al-Wahhāb al-Naǧǧār, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Cairo: n.d.).